

UESDAY, JANUARY 16, 1990

Letters

U.S. Can Help Soviet Private Entrepreneurs

To the Editor:

It is understandable that William Safire finds the "Z" article in the winter issue of *Daedalus* important (column, Jan. 4), because it affirms his skeptical reading of Mikhail S. Gorbachev. It is less clear why you gave the article such prominence, excerpting it on the same Op-Ed page. The article's main conclusion is a warmed-over version of the arguments used to justify the Bush Administration's early reluctance to support perestroika and glasnost: that the Soviet Union is, after all, still a Communist system, and any outside aid will simply help prolong that system's life.

Z reaches this conclusion by positing unbridgeable gaps between Bolshevism and democracy and between command and market economies, and by putting forward a crude cold-war image of the Communist Party. He argues that reform ("soft Communism") is impossible because Soviet institutions, and particularly the Communist Party, are incapable of introducing true reform.

The party in this view is incapable of reform because it will ineluctably seek to maintain its role in the system. How does Z explain the significant numbers of reform Communists, including the radical group of deputies in the Supreme Soviet, who seek to reduce the role of the party and create a multiparty system? It is not at all inconceivable that in the next few years this wing could come to dominate party decision-making

bodies, as has happened in the Communist parties of the Baltic republics.

While it is true that the measures adopted so far are inadequate to achieve either democracy or marketization, it is too soon to say they will not be expanded in the absence of total collapse. Mr. Gorbachev is not basing his reforms, as Z states, on structures programmed for "hard" Communism. The new Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet are unlike any previous Soviet political institutions and have shown considerable assertiveness — particularly in rejecting appointees for government posts and in sending back for revision draft laws that it considered too conservative. Ultimately, this too undermines the role of the party in setting policy.

Z concludes that United States assistance to President Gorbachev would be counterproductive; it would only "prolong the agony" and delay the inevitable collapse of the system, though he makes an exception for aid for "parallel structures in a private sector . . . to promote economic and, eventually, political pluralism." This point is well taken, though by confining the discussion to free economic zones, Z ignores another option: to open a major program to assist the thousands of new Soviet private enterprises called cooperatives.

While mostly confined to the service sector and small-scale production, a few large state enterprises have been privatized and turned into coop-

eratives. These enterprises face severe problems in technological modernization and access to supplies, mostly because economic reform has stalled in other areas. The United States Government could provide incentives for American companies to create joint ventures with cooperatives and help modernize them. The United States could also support management training programs for Soviet private entrepreneurs.

These and other steps would increase the vitality of what has already become the most dynamic sector of the Soviet economy and help push the Soviets along the path of reform.

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Durham, N.C., Jan. 4, 1990

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Don't Listen, Lithuania

To the Editor:

Robert Schaeffer in "To Lithuania: Stay Put" (Op-Ed, Jan. 3) either lacks understanding of the situation in Lithuania and the history behind it, or he uses false analogies deliberately. For instance, comparing the desire of Lithuanians to be free of foreign oppressors, who have forcibly occupied their country more than once in its long history, is in no manner comparable to the reasons behind our own Civil War. In contrast to Mr. Schaeffer's arguments, stability does not result from condoning foreign occupation, but from freedom and voluntary association.

Lithuania was an independent state